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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [HSTC](#) [GG](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING VICTIMS HELD IN GEORGIA RETURNED TO ARMENIA

REF: YEREVAN 406

Classified By: Poloff Masha Herbst for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Two alleged Armenian trafficking victims who had been held in a Georgian jail for six months returned to Armenia May 17, and are in the care of an active anti-trafficking NGO. Anti-trafficking activists hailed the return of Anna Harutyunyan and Lianna Krasnova as a textbook case of good cooperation between NGOs and Armenian government and law enforcement officials. The case also demonstrated cooperation from the Georgian government, which released the trafficking victims into Armenian custody three days after receiving sufficient evidence from Armenia. END SUMMARY.

GOAM ASKS FOR OUR HELP

¶2. (C) Armen Yeganian, Director (A/S equivalent) of the MFA's Americas Department, called in polchief and anti-TIP officer for a May 11 meeting to discuss TIP issues. Accompanied by the MFA's anti-TIP director and USA desk officer, Yeganian first updated us briefly on the GOAM's progress in its investigation of fugitive Uzbek trafficker Anush Zakharyants (reftel), noting that the GOAM would soon issue an Interpol Red Notice (international arrest warrant). Yeganian then asked for our assistance in securing the release of the women in prison in Georgia. He said the Georgian authorities were not convinced the two women were trafficking victims, and had thus far not been receptive to the GOAM's request for the women's release, though the Armenian consul in Tbilisi had worked assiduously toward this end. He said that Armenian law enforcement had determined that the women were trafficking victims.

¶3. (C) As it turned out, strenuous USG action was unnecessary. We contacted Embassy Tbilisi, which made immediate inquiries and learned that the Armenian consul had in fact made some progress in the case, and that the women imminently would be released to Armenian custody.

¶4. (C) We had first heard of the case several months ago from the anti-trafficking NGO Hope and Help (please protect). They told us that two alleged trafficking victims had been deported from Turkey to Georgia, and were being held there in jail on illegal migration charges. At the time, Hope and Help director Yenok Shatvorian told us he was merely giving us information, and not asking for help, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was handling the case capably.

ACTION IN GEORGIA

¶5. (C) Keti Khutsishvili, head of the International Relations section of the Prosecutor's General's Office gave Tbilisi Poloff a read-out on the case on May 14. Khutsishvili said that in November 2006 Anna Harutyunyan and Lianna Krasnova were arrested for illegally crossing the Georgian border. During their interrogation and the criminal proceedings against them, neither of the accused claimed to be victims of TIP or mentioned trafficking-related issues, according to GOG contacts. In February 2007, the two accused asked to be re-interrogated to offer new information. At this point, they said they were victims of trafficking. The border crossing case was frozen while a new investigation began into whether or not they were TIP victims.

6 (C) Khutsishvili's office appealed to Yerevan for evidence and information regarding Anna Harutyunyan and Lianna Krasnova and their accusations of having been trafficked. In March, Georgia received information from Yerevan that the person Anna Harutyunyan and Lianna Krasnova accused of trafficking them denied any involvement with or knowledge about them. Khutsishvili said this report alone did not substantiate Harutyunyan and Krasovna's claim to being victim's of TIP. A second report arrived from Yerevan on May 14 with expanded testimony from Anna Harutyunyan and Lianna Krasnova's family and other witnesses which better supported their claim of being victims of TIP. Accordingly, the Georgian Government decided to release Anna Harutyunyan and Lianna Krasnova from custody and guilt and return them to Yerevan, where the Armenian court system could pursue the

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case against their alleged trafficker. Khutsishvili said the Georgian government would also turn over any information they have relative to the case. Khutsishvili informed Tbilisi Poloff on May 17 that Harutyunyan and Krasnova had been released from Georgian custody in to the care of the Armenian Consul and were on their way back to Armenia.

SAFE RETURN

¶7. (C) We learned from Armen Yeganian the evening of May 17 that the women had been returned to Armenia across the Georgian land border, where border officials had been pre-notified by Armenian MFA officials to expect them and expedite their repatriation and transport to a suitable care facility without bureaucratic hassles. During a May 18 conversation, Hope and Help confirmed that the women were safely in the NGO's Yerevan shelter, receiving psychiatric and medical attention. They told us that cooperation between the MFA, the National Security Service, the police and the border guards had been flawless, and that law enforcement was preparing a case against the Vanadzor-based trafficking ring that sent the victims to Turkey.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: We are encouraged that the GOAM took the initiative to ask for our help in resolving this case, though they might have done so a bit sooner. This issue was brought to our attention by some of our most dedicated anti-trafficking partners in the Armenian government, who know that GOAM's victim assistance efforts, while much better than last year, still could stand some improvement. We were pleased to have an opportunity to help them (even if only, as it turns out, with a request for information) in making a proactive, concrete victim assistance effort. Their conduct in this incident, and the NGO's positive readout of law enforcement cooperation, is consistent with the trend towards improvement that we have seen across all segments of Armenia's anti-trafficking effort over the last year.

¶9. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy Tbilisi.
GODFREY